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REVIEW ARTICLE

The Vikings in Ireland and Beyond: New Research and New Directions?*

There are surprisingly few general studies of the Vikings in Ireland, and modern, single-authored, monographs covering the entire period are almost unknown. Indeed, the broader history and archaeology of Viking-age Ireland is only a little better served. Donnchadh Ó Corráin's *Ireland before the Normans*, ground-breaking in its day, owes at least some of its continuing popularity to the fact that it has had few clear successors.¹ To Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, like Ó Corráin, the Hiberno-Norse are best seen as part a broader, Irish narrative, exerting important military, social and economic influences on the indigenous population.² Duffy, whose *Medieval Ireland* begins with Clontarf,³ and Bhreathnach, whose *Ireland in the medieval world*⁴ ends at roughly the same time, integrate the Vikings into chapters that deal with broader, socio-political narratives that have an essentially 'Irish' focus. Archaeological studies such as that by Edwards are more inclined to given the 'Vikings' their own distinct sections,⁵ but a major project recently completed by O'Sullivan *et al* integrates Hiberno-Norse evidence within broader, thematic chapters.⁶ The few monographs that do not incorporate the Hiberno-Norse within an essentially Irish narrative instead place them in a broader insular (i.e. British and Irish) context, with Smyth's *Scandinavian York and Dublin*⁷ and Downham's *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland* being the most obvious examples of this approach.⁸ Griffiths' *Vikings of the Irish Sea* is both more geographically focused and more interdisciplinary, exploring the Scandinavian diaspora around what has sometimes been called a 'Viking lake'.⁹ By placing the Hiberno-Norse communities of Ireland in wider ethnic, social and political contexts, these and other studies have provided valuable new insights to the field.

* ***The Vikings in Ireland and beyond: before and after the Battle of Clontarf*. Edited by H.B. Clarke and Ruth Johnson. Four Courts Press. Dublin, 2015. Pp. 560. ISBN 978-1-84682-495-1. €40/£35.**

¹ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972).

² Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland 400-1200* (London, 1995).

³ Séan Duffy, *Ireland in the middle ages* (Dublin, 1997).

⁴ Edel Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the medieval world AD400-1000: landscape, kingship and religion* (Dublin, 2014).

⁵ Nancy Edwards, *The archaeology of early medieval Ireland* (London, 1990).

⁶ Aidan O'Sullivan, Finbar McCormick, T.R. Kerr and Lorcan Harney, *Early medieval Ireland AD400-1100: the evidence from archaeological excavations* (Dublin, 2014); see also www.emap.ie [last accessed 6 April 2017]

⁷ A.P. Smyth *Scandinavian York and Dublin: the history and archaeology of two related Viking kingdoms* (2 vols, Dublin, 1975-9). Predating major archaeological publications on either site, it is striking that almost all the 'archaeological' evidence in these volumes is numismatic.

⁸ Clare Downham, *Viking kings of Britain and Ireland: the dynasty of Ívarr to AD1014* (Edinburgh, 2007).

⁹ David Griffiths, *Vikings of the Irish Sea* (Stroud, 2010).

Nonetheless, neither these 'insular' volumes nor the aforementioned 'Irish' volumes focus on the Hiberno-Norse population. The late Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin's *The Vikings: An Illustrated History* is an exception in this regard, but he would have been one of the first to admit that it was written for a general rather than an academic audience.¹⁰ At the present time, Valante's *Vikings in Ireland* stands in a kind of splendid isolation as the only modern single-authored academic monograph on the subject, albeit with a specific emphasis on 'settlement, trade and urbanization'.¹¹

Instead, publications with a specific focus on this subject are characteristically short, more or less focused articles on a wide range of historical, archaeological, and more rarely linguistic and art historical themes. While it is surprisingly difficult to identify individual 'ground-breaking' papers, this body of publications, taken as a whole, has transformed the discipline since the 1960s. Although some aspects of Binchy's 1962 discussion remain valid, for example, few modern scholars would seriously consider the Viking Age as the 'passing of the old order'.¹² The revolution in archaeological thought has been even more profound. Fifty years ago, in 1957, it was still possible for Little to dismiss the contribution of Scandinavian groups to the development of settlement at Dublin entirely.¹³ Major excavations in the intervening decades, most notably at Wood Quay, have made his elaborate arguments completely unsustainable.¹⁴ Most of these academic papers have been published in Irish and British journals or general edited volumes, but there have been a few occasions when groups of papers on Viking Ireland have been published together. By and large, these have been milestones in the field, crystallising the sometimes conflicting views of the academic community at the time of publication.

The first (and shortest) of these edited volumes was the *Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress*, published in 1976 but drawing on the 1973 (international) Viking Congress, the first to be held in Ireland.¹⁵ All seven papers have an Irish focus, and provide a mixture of what was then cutting-edge archaeological, linguistic and historical analysis, including one of the first publications on the archaeology of Viking Dublin.¹⁶ Twenty-two years later, and more than a decade after the key

¹⁰ Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, *The Vikings: an Illustrated History* (Dublin, 2002).

¹¹ M.A. Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland: settlement, trade and urbanization* (Dublin, 2008).

¹² D.A. Binchy, 'The passing of the old order', *Proceedings of the International Congress of Celtic Studies* (Dublin, 1962), 119-32

¹³ G.A. Little, *Dublin before the Vikings: an adventure in discovery* (Dublin, 1957).

¹⁴ For excellent summaries of the Dublin excavations, see Linzi Simpson, 'Forty years a-digging: a preliminary synthesis of archaeological investigations in medieval Dublin' in S. Duffy (ed.) *Medieval Dublin 1* (Dublin, 2000), 11-68 and eadem, 'Fifty years a-digging: a synthesis of medieval archaeological investigations in Dublin City and suburbs' in S. Duffy (ed.) *Medieval Dublin 11* (Dublin, 2011), 9-112

¹⁵ Bo Almquist and David Greene (eds), *Proceedings of the seventh Viking Congress, Dublin 15-21 August 1973* (Dublin, 1976).

¹⁶ Breandán Ó Ríordáin, 'The High Street excavations' in Almquist and Greene (eds), *Proceedings of the seventh Viking Congress*, 135-40

excavations at Wood Quay came to an end,¹⁷ came *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*.¹⁸ This was another conference-based publication, this one held at Dublin Castle to commemorate the twelve hundredth anniversary of the first recorded Viking raid on Ireland in 795. Several of its sixteen papers drew new links between Ireland and Scandinavia, but most focused on Irish Viking activity, or on Irish literary accounts of 'Viking' activity. While the papers were clearly divided into 'archaeology' and 'history and literature', the volume benefitted greatly from the diverse skill set of its editors and authors and presented cutting-edge papers of a consistently high standard. Three years later, in 2001, came *The Vikings in Ireland*, a Danish publication linked to a special exhibition at the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde.¹⁹ The eleven papers commissioned for this publication are of mixed quality, with some rather better referenced than others: most are summaries of existing scholarship rather than new contributions, but the volume (now available online) remains a useful 'statement of play'.²⁰ Just under a decade later, the second hosting of the Viking Congress by Ireland was marked by another collection of essays – *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West*.²¹ The differences between this 2010 volume and that from 1976 are striking. No less that fifty papers were published, with a corresponding increase in overall size and reduction in the length of individual papers. It is perhaps a reflection of the changing nature of the Congress that despite the title, only eighteen articles have Ireland as their focus: the remainder summarise new research from Iceland to Scandinavian, and even Spain.

It is to this honourable tradition of edited collections that the present volume – *The Vikings in Ireland and Beyond: Before and after the Battle of Clontarf* – belongs. Unlike most of the earlier collections, this is not the proceedings of a conference, but rather a group of twenty-eight substantial articles commissioned by the editors, H.B. Clarke and Ruth Johnson, to commemorate the millennium of the Battle of Clontarf. The papers are divided into five sections, of rather unequal length: In Prospect; Before the Battle; During the Battle; After the Battle; and In Retrospect. Those taking the subtitle literally will, perhaps, be disappointed. 'During the Battle' is one of the shortest sections, with just two papers, both of which are proseographies of key figures rather than assessments of the Battle itself. However, the millennium saw a number of key publications on this subject, notably McGettigan's excellent introduction to *The Battle of Clontarf*²² and Duffy's more comprehensive *Brian*

¹⁷ The National Museum of Ireland fascicule series *Medieval Dublin Excavations 1962-81* (1987-present) can now be supplemented by P.F. Wallace, *Viking Dublin: the Wood Quay excavations* (Sallins, 2016).

¹⁸ H.B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Ragnall Ó Floinn (eds), *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age* (Dublin, 1998).

¹⁹ Anne-Christine Larsen (ed.), *The Vikings in Ireland* (Roskilde, 2001).

²⁰ <https://www.scribd.com/document/23478636/The-Viking-Ship-Museum-Vikings-in-Ireland>

²¹ John Sheehan and Donnchadh Ó Corráin (eds), *The Viking age: Ireland and the West: proceedings of the fifteenth Viking congress* (Dublin, 2010).

²² Darren McGettigan, *The Battle of Clontarf: Good Friday 1014* (Dublin, 2013).

Boru and the Battle of Clontarf.²³ A slightly earlier publication, Ní Mhaonaigh's *Brian Boru: Ireland's greatest king?* had already reassessed the exceptionally complex sources for this battle for a new generation of scholars.²⁴ Ní Mhaonaigh's contribution to the present volume takes a similar source-critical approach to accounts of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (Máel Sechnaill II) in Middle Irish sources, re-evaluating the evidence for his alleged (mis)conduct on the battlefield. Clarke's account of the life of Sitriuc Silkenbeard, on the other hand, subtitled 'a great survivor', is one of the first modern academic studies of a remarkable and long-lived figure whose not insignificant achievements are witnessed by both textual sources and archaeological discoveries at Dublin and elsewhere.

Thus, even the two papers in the 'During the Battle' section emphasise context rather than Clontarf itself, but then contextualisation is the great strength of this volume. It begins by providing a historiographical context, as the editors assess the intellectual development of Irish Viking studies, providing a comprehensive overview of key sources and developments that is long overdue, and identifying some peculiarities of the field that may merit further investigation. The bulk of the volume is given over to the sections on 'before' and 'after' the Battle, with twelve and eleven papers respectively, and these cover a remarkably wide range of subjects and approaches. Some papers sit a little uneasily in their respective sections because of their chronological range, while others have a very tight focus on specific sites or issues. This is a characteristic of many of the archaeological contributions in particular.

The 'before' section is dominated by discussion of *longphuirt*, a term that in the present context refers to early Viking age defended sites created by Scandinavian groups in Ireland. This deliberately focused application of an early medieval term can be contrasted with the steady expansion of another – 'Viking' – to cover almost all migrant or itinerant Scandinavians in this period. Approaches to *longphuirt* are varied. Kelly provides an up-to-date summary of his extensive survey evidence, including several potential new sites. Purcell, on the other hand, examines the literary evidence, and argues that Viking bases must have been established in Ireland long before AD841, when the term is first recorded in the Irish annals. Etchingham also takes a predominantly documentary approach, examining the evidence for the important Viking base at *Linn Duachaill* (the modern Annagassan, Co. Louth), which for a brief period in the ninth century seems to have rivalled Dublin, and where focused survey and excavation are beginning to reveal the scale and extent of activity. Simpson presents a paper focusing on one of the Viking skeletons discovered during her excavations on South Great George's Street – a figure who must have been associated with the Dublin

²³ Seán Duffy, *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf* (Dublin, 2013).

²⁴ Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru: Ireland's greatest king* (Stroud, 2007).

longphort, whatever the precise date of its foundation, or indeed the deposition of his body. Sheehan's paper is on the impressive silver assemblage from Woodstown, Co. Waterford, which is at the present time the only other potential *longphort* site to have undergone sustained archaeological investigation, albeit on a small portion of the site. This hack-silver, together with the large number of lead weights from the site, promises to transform our understanding of activity not just at Woodstown but at *longphuirt* more generally. This theme is picked up on by Gareth Williams, who draws attention to parallels between Irish and British silver assemblages recovered from what he calls Viking 'camps' and argues that although occupation at most of these sites was short-lived, they had significant economic as well as military importance. It is a shame that Russell and Hurley's excavation report on *Woodstown* was published a little too late for the contributors to this volume:²⁵ it would have added extra dimension to these papers, which together summarise a rapidly developing research area.

In many ways, debates on the nature and character of *longphuirt* have supplanted older debates on urbanization that dominated discussion of Hiberno-Norse settlement in the 1980s and 1990s. While many of the 'after' papers make use of material from urban contexts, there is only one paper that specifically addresses this subject. Hodkinson pulls together the evidence for Limerick and its hinterland in a useful study of a neglected Hiberno-Norse town. Urban life at Dublin is represented by Byrne's 'preliminary view' of the important Castle Street excavations, a paper that presents some evidence for the first time. Woods, on the other hand, focuses on hoards, discussing the important example(s) found during that excavation, as well as a comparable hoard from excavations at Werburgh Street.

Economics remains central to any discussion of urban development in Ireland and elsewhere, but some of the papers in this volume also manifest a new concern with social, political and ethnic identity. Downham's contribution on the *Gallgoídil* of south-west Scotland – a classic 'hybrid' group – is a case in point, although here, she takes a more narrative approach than in much of her extensive work elsewhere. In general, Irish Viking specialists have been slow to explore ideas of ethnicity. The term 'Hiberno-Norse' gained widespread currency at a relatively early date, not least through the work of Wallace,²⁶ but the ready acceptance of the hybrid identity of 'Viking' communities in Ireland, and the adoption of the term 'Hiberno-Norse' to reflect this has, perhaps, discouraged detailed analysis of a number of underlying issues. How did the 'Norse' become 'Hiberno-Norse'? Was their identity fixed or fluid, particularly through time? And is their material culture an essentially passive response to a new environment, or a conscious manipulation of that culture to express a changing socio-political

²⁵ Ian Russell and M.F. Hurley (eds) *Woodstown: A Viking-age settlement in Co. Waterford* (Dublin, 2014).

²⁶ See, in particular, P.F. Wallace, 'The archaeological identity of the Hiberno-Norse town', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 122 (1992), 35-66.

identity? The recent publication of Judith Jesch's *Viking Diaspora* has raised similar issues in the wider 'Viking world', questioning the extent to which 'Viking' identity was essentially uniform, even at the highest social levels.²⁷ In an Irish context, Boyd's contribution to the collection, 'Where are the longhouses?', may be a sign of things to come. Given the key role of house forms in Wallace's arguments for a Hiberno-Norse material culture more than twenty years ago,²⁸ it is particularly appropriate that this latest research focuses on the same evidence – although it also reflects a key issue with the Dublin assemblage (see below). Lee's paper also focuses on identity, but specifically on women, and examines evidence from across the Irish Sea area, giving a slightly different perspective. Griffiths paper on 'Irish Sea identities' covers a similar area, again tackling issues of identity head-on, and it may be this characteristic of the paper which led the editors to place it in the 'Retrospect' section, where it sits a little uneasily with a paper by Ó Corráin on 'the catastrophe' – a candid reassessment of the Viking impact as a whole with an historiographical approach that balances the opening paper very effectively.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the present volume, however, is the number and quality of papers dealing with art and art-historical issues. Several early explorations of what we would now think of as ethnicity were led by art-historians, or at least archaeologists with strong art-historical interests such as Lang, but commentators on Viking art have always been rare in Ireland.²⁹ However, this collection includes no less than five papers on different aspects of 'Viking' art in Ireland, many of which return to themes that have not received serious academic attention for years. Perhaps the most wide-ranging is Johnson's re-examination of the tenth-century 'hiatus' in Irish art, a phenomenon supposedly linked to the ferocity of Viking raids, but which she dismisses on very sound grounds. McGraw's paper on 'motif-pieces' – the 'trial pieces' of Heaney's famous poem – reflects Norwegian rather than Irish intellectual traditions; she views these objects as communication tools within and between individuals and communities. Corlett takes a more conventional or 'Irish' approach to those enigmatic monuments, the Rathdown slabs, which may (or may not!) represent the only potential Irish parallel for the extensive Insular Scandinavian sculptural tradition of northern England and the Isle of Man. O'Meadhra's paper places Hiberno-Norse art in a wider context, examining potential links between it and Scandinavian art, while Murray takes an explicitly political approach to the 'Hiberno-Urnes style', examining the implications of decoration on the cross of Cong. Those working outside the immediate field could be forgiven for thinking that the study of Hiberno-Norse art has been in the

²⁷ Judith Jesch, *The Viking diaspora* (London, 2015).

²⁸ Wallace, 'Archaeological identity', *passim*.

²⁹ J.T. Lang, *Viking-age decorated wood: a study in its ornament and style*. Medieval Dublin Excavations 1962-81 B1 (Dublin, 1988).

doldrums for a decade or more: these papers prove that this is not necessarily the case, and it is encouraging to see art history contributing to larger debates in the field once again.

The remaining papers in the volume are useful but diverse. Perhaps the most isolated contribution, at least in this present context, is Fuglesang's paper on 'pre-Christian sanctuaries in northern Europe, a paper which (uniquely for this volume) does not touch on Ireland at all. Halpin and O'Sullivan, on the other hand, present detailed archaeological studies of Hiberno-Norse artefacts: the Ballinderry bow and a bead assemblage from Dunmore Cave respectively, with both returning to the issues of identity touched on by so many papers in the volume. Fellows-Jensen also considers identity, evaluating the very limited evidence for 'Viking' influence on personal names in Ireland. Cathy Swift, on the other hand, draws on documentary sources, considering the evidence for what she calls Hiberno-Scandinavian military culture in Middle Irish literature. Last but by no means least is a paper that pushes far beyond these islands; Reilly presents an excellent summary of new environmental evidence at key 'Viking' urban sites in Ireland, England, Scandinavian and Russia, revisiting some of the themes of urban development that dominated the scholarship of the 1980s and early 1990s, but using new material and perspectives. While almost all modern excavation reports include some discussion of environmental evidence, it is refreshing to see this relatively complex evidence summarised by an expert in the field.

Overall, this collection provides an excellent summary of the present state of Irish Viking studies, reflecting the wide geographical base of scholarship and the interdisciplinary nature of the field. The quality of the papers is consistently high, and the collection covers most key forms of evidence, albeit with different levels of engagement. Some of the general papers, while not necessarily presenting new evidence, provide readily accessible summaries, often providing a context for the more focused presentations of 'new' evidence that characterise other contributions. As is the case with its predecessor volumes, particularly the 1998 *Ireland and Scandinavia* volume, it reflects current academic concerns, and may well point to future developments in the field.

Predictions of such developments are always problematic, but the publication of a volume of this kind must encourage some speculation. The divide between those who see 'Viking' Ireland as a sub-set of Irish (early) medieval studies, and those who see it as part of a broader 'Viking' world remains strong, even if the work of Downham, Griffiths and Ní Mhaonaigh, among others, is beginning to challenge this. Very few scholars have sufficient linguistic training to engage with Irish, Anglo-Saxon and Norse sources, and almost all of us are guilty of being more comfortable in one literary *milieu* than another. Inevitably, this has an impact on research focus and outputs. Archaeologists and those engaging with material culture seem to have a more even playing field, but diverse recording

strategies, terminology and intellectual traditions can make long-distance comparative studies surprisingly problematic. In this context, the new-found Irish interest in *longphuirt* is particularly interesting, because it has coincided with a wider European resurgence of interest in Viking and Viking-age fortifications, from England³⁰ to the continent³¹ and indeed Denmark³² and Sweden.³³ These and other new discoveries and research projects should ensure that Viking camps will remain a major research theme for the foreseeable future. At the same time, debates on urbanization are changing, moving away from issues of definition towards issues of social identity³⁴ and economic management.³⁵ Despite the undoubted importance of Ireland's Viking towns, however, their contribution to these debates will remain limited until such time as publication and dissemination issues are resolved. The Dublin Excavations Publications Project has produced a number of key fascicules,³⁶ but the publication of much important material remains outstanding, and unavailable for comparative study. The situation with the many development-driven excavations associated with the Celtic Tiger is even more problematic. Individual excavators are to be commended for their publication efforts, either as monographs or as summaries in *Medieval Dublin*, and the new database produced by the Dublin Archaeology Project (and spearheaded by one of the editors of this volume) is a triumph³⁷, but the process of comparing evidence, particularly artefacts, from across Dublin remains 'hit-and-miss' and this severely limits the research that can be carried out. No extended comparison of the material culture of York and Dublin has ever been published: given the close political connections between the two settlements in the ninth and early tenth centuries, and the apparent lack of close parallels in material culture, a reassessment of their socio-political relationship has to become an interdisciplinary

³⁰ Most recently, D.M. Hadley and J.D. Richards, 'The winter camp of the Viking great army, AD872-3, Torksey, Lincolnshire', *The Antiquaries Journal* 96 (2016), 23-67. For a more general overview, see Ben Raffield, 'Antiquarians, archaeologists, and Viking fortifications', in *Journal of the north Atlantic* 20 (2013), 1-29.

³¹ Ten Harkel, Letty, 'A Viking age landscape of defence in the Low Countries? The *ringwalburgen* in the Dutch province of Zeeland', in John Baker, Stuart Brookes and Andrew Reynolds (eds), *Landscapes of Defence in Early Medieval Europe*. Studies in the early middle ages 28 (Turnhout, 2013), 223-61.

³² E.g. Else Roesdahl, S.M. Sindbæk, A. Pedersen and D.M. Wilson (eds) *Aggersborg: the Viking-age settlement and fortress*. Jutland Archaeological Society Publications 82 (Højbjerg, 2014).

³³ Hedenstierna-Jonson, Charlotte, Holmqvist, Lena, and Olausson, Michael, 'The Viking age paradox; continuity and discontinuity of fortifications and defence works in eastern Scandinavia', in Baker *et al*, *Landscapes of defence*, 285-302.

³⁴ See, in particular, D.M. Hadley and Letty ten Harkel (eds), *Everyday life in Viking-age towns: social approaches to towns in England and Ireland, c.800-1100* (Oxford, 2013).

³⁵ See, for example, Dagfinn Skre (ed.) *Means of exchange: Kaupang Excavation Project Publication Series 2. Norske Oldfunn* 23(Århus, 2007).

³⁶ Various authors, *Medieval Dublin Excavations 1962-81*, Ser A-C (Dublin, 1987 – present).

³⁷ <https://www.heritagemaps.ie/WebApps/DublinArchaeologyProject/index.html>.

research priority. Equally important is a review of the potential links between Dublin and Kaupang in the light of new research carried out at the latter site.³⁸

If access issues can be resolved, the Irish evidence is such that there is the potential to engage with some other key areas of Viking studies. The need to reassess the term 'Hiberno-Norse' has already been noted, as has its potential contribution to broader revaluations of diasporic and complex identities. Ireland is already relatively well-integrated into debates on the 'Viking' silver bullion economy, largely through the work of Sheehan, but broader questions on the nature of trade and exchange need to be revisited, particularly the scale, extent and character of the slave-trade. Superficially, there seems to be a gulf between those who study long-distance exchange in the Viking world, characterised by the 'dirhams for slaves' project based at the University of Oxford,³⁹ most of whom argue that slavery was extensive and immensely profitable, and those studying Scandinavia in particular, where the institution of slavery is viewed as relatively unimportant.⁴⁰ It is almost thirty years since Holm's ground-breaking article on the slave-trade in Dublin was published,⁴¹ and the evidence is clearly in need of review. It is, of course problematic from both historical (documentary) and archaeological perspectives, but the fact that both forms of evidence can be juxtaposed in the case of Ireland should mean that Irish Viking-age scholars will be in a strong position to contribute to the broader debate on slavery in the Viking world.

Another key area of development will be gender studies, and in particular a reconsideration the role of women in Viking society. The recent media storm surrounding Macleod's 'Warriors and women' paper demonstrates the level of public interest in the topic,⁴² as well as some of the problems associated with its dissemination. A general assumption that women were present throughout the Viking diaspora, but largely invisible in surviving documentary and archaeological records has now been challenged by Barrett, who argues that the number of medium to high status women in Scandinavia may have been artificially depressed through selective female infanticide.⁴³ Therefore, competition for the right to marry might have been a key driving force behind early Viking expansion.⁴⁴

³⁸ Dagfinn Skre (ed.), *Kaupang Excavation Project Publication Series 1-3. Norske Oldfunn 22-4* (Århus, 2007-2011).

³⁹ <http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/dirhamsforslaves/index.php/en/> [last accessed 1.vi.2017].

⁴⁰ For a recent discussion of the Scandinavian evidence, see Stefan Brink, 'Slavery in the Viking Age' in Stefan Brink w/ Neil Price (eds) *The Viking World*. (London, 2008), 49-56.

⁴¹ Poul Holm, 'The slave trade of Dublin, ninth to twelfth centuries', *Peritia* 5 (1986), 317-45.

⁴² Shane McLeod, 'Warriors and women: the sex ratio of Norse migrants to eastern England up to 900 AD', in *Early medieval Europe* 19 (2011), 332-53.

⁴³ J.H. Barrett, 'Rounding up the usual suspects; causation and the Viking diaspora', in A. Anderson, J.H. Barrett and K.V. Boyle (eds), *The global origins and development of seafaring* (Cambridge, 2010), 293, 296

⁴⁴ Barrett's idea has been further developed by Ben Raffield, Neil Price and Mark Collard, 'Male-biased operational sex ratios and the Viking phenomenon: an evolutionary anthropological perspective on late Iron age Scandinavian raiding', in *Evolution and Human Behaviour* (2016), *forthcoming*

Newly published evidence from Ireland, in contrast, points to an unexpectedly high status for some Viking women, who are more prominent in the early burial record than previously thought – albeit less so than in other parts of the Viking diaspora such as Scotland.⁴⁵ Nor need gender studies stop with women. Male gender roles are also being re-evaluated across the Viking world,⁴⁶ and again, the Irish evidence, documentary and archaeological, is such that there is the potential to make a real contribution to this debate.

However, the extent to which Irish academics will contribute to these developing debates is a pressing concern. The present volume demonstrates the vibrancy of Viking studies in Ireland today, but the extent to which this is sustainable is a matter of real concern. Despite the undisputed fact that Dublin was one of the most important Viking centres in Western Europe, no university in Dublin has ever employed an archaeologist specialising in ‘Viking’, let alone Hiberno-Norse, material culture, and at the present time, there is just one fully employed university-based historian researching the settlement. Outside Dublin, there is only one Viking specialist in a permanent academic post, and across the island, it is increasingly difficult for undergraduates and even postgraduates to take modules or courses on Viking Ireland, let alone acquire specialist skills such as Old Norse. The paucity of scholars working with Hiberno-Norse art has already been noted, and this can only reflect the absence of any permanent member of staff with a sustained interest in the subject in any Irish university for more than a decade. This does not bode well for the future of the field as a whole.

This is in no way to demean the work of scholars (many represented in this volume) who are employed in the commercial sector, semi-state bodies, or elsewhere, but it does raise the issue of whether or not Viking studies in Ireland is sustainable in the longer term. With fewer and fewer ‘Viking’ courses available even at undergraduate level, who will train the next generation? Will the study of Hiberno-Norse activity continue, at best, to be a minor adjunct of early medieval Irish studies, turning its back once again on the wider Viking diaspora? In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the study of Viking Ireland was largely driven by visiting scholars such as J.J.A. Worsaae or Alexander Bugge,⁴⁷ and by a limited number of interested non-specialists based on the island. Many Irish scholars seem convinced that the dual bars of language and ‘unique’ material culture render Hiberno-Norse

⁴⁵ S.H. Harrison and Ragnall Ó Floinn, *Viking graves and Grave-goods in Ireland*. Medieval Dublin Excavations 1962-81 Ser B11 (2014), 290-1

⁴⁶ See, for example, D.M. Hadley, ‘Warriors, heroes and companions: negotiating masculinity in Viking-age England’, in *Anglo-saxon studies in archaeology and history* 15 (2008), 270-84.

⁴⁷ E.g. J.J.A. Worsaae, *An account of the Danes and Norwegians in England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1852), 297-353; Alexander Bugge, ‘Nordisk sprog og nordisk nationalitet i Irland’ *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie* 15 (2nd ser)(1904), 279-332.

culture inaccessible to others, but if a vacuum of local scholarship develops, is there not a real danger that this may be the case again?

At the present time, however, it seems clear that such worries are for the future. This volume represents an exceptionally clear, interdisciplinary snapshot of a thriving field, and will undoubtedly take its place among the essay collections that were discussed in the introduction. The wide-ranging papers represent essential reading for anyone interested in almost any aspect of Irish Viking studies, and the volume will form a useful reference text for many years to come. Given its scope and range, it is appropriate that the final word of the volume (by Ó Corráin) is a question – ‘Why?’ With such diverse evidence and wide-ranging scholarship, we can look forward to finding out.

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